

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Halone servilis at Castlemaine – a first for Victoria?

- Photo by Peter Marriott

Peter Marriott on Moths

At the last meeting we were treated to a lively presentation by the author of the new "Moths of Victoria" series of booklets, illustrating with projected images, representatives of the families covered in the first four volumes, (two of which have been published, and were reviewed by Chris Timewell in volumes 34.6 and 35.1 of the Castlemaine Naturalist.) These excellent booklets include a CD full of photos extending the coverage of the volume. They are an ongoing project, and given that over 2000 species are known to occur in Victoria, and that there are many more to be described, it would seem Peter has an endless task ahead. Indeed, he speculated that there could be four to five thousand species to be found in this state, and that of an estimated 20,000 in Australia, only 12,000 are named.

By comparison, there are less than 300 species of butterflies. This group of the Lepidoptera are generally distinguished by being day flyers, resting with wings together, and having clubbed antennae. Peter pointed out however, that there are exceptions to all these "rules". Among many interesting facts related were the common confusion of Bogong Moths with some other species, and the fact that Emperor Gum moths are disappearing around Melbourne, possibly due to attack by European Wasps.

Peters' enthusiasm kept the meeting going for some time, stopping once for a communal exercise break, and there were many questions during supper. Mine was about his photographic method, to which he produced his camera, a specialised Nikon macro device with its own dedicated ring flash. This lighting arrangement produces rather clinical pictures with even lighting and little or no shadow. Not great artistically, but perfect for scientific purposes. He uses it for both live and pin mounted specimens.

After the meeting, Peter spent some time looking for moths at Denis Hurleys' and among those he managed to photograph, he turned up something rare. He has emailed the photo above and the following comments: "It is a Halone servilis and is the first record (as far as I can tell) for the species in the state." ... "You can see

similar things in MOV 2 page 24 and the Halone species on the CD will show how others sit"

Although in the study of moths it is not unusual to find undescribed species, it is fascinating to know that they are in our midst, and who knows what may turn up if we floodlight a sheet after dark.

Noel Young

THE BURNING QUESTION 'To burn, or not to burn?'

Natalie de Maccus

That is the question that Shakespeare may have asked if he had been a Field Naturalist. On Saturday 13th March we visited the site of the Department of Sustainability and Environment's burn at Kalimna. This site is adjacent to the area covered in our Wildflower Walk on 7.10.09, at which Frances Cincotta recorded 34 flowering species. (See Newsletter report for November 2009 for full list) The purpose of our return visit was to establish how the area had responded to the burn and to see what recovery had occurred.

The burnt area had been patchily burned with some sections having been severely burned and showing almost no recognizable vegetation. In other sections many plants were quite scorched, but recognizable. And still other sections were like unburned oases, although surrounded by substantially burned areas.

Some of the most severely burned plants seemed to be making rapid recovery with new growth sprouting from the charred bases; for example *Dianella admixta* (Black-anther Flax-lily), *Bursaria spinosa* ssp *spinosa* (Sweet Bursaria), *Philotheca verrucosa* (Fairy Wax-flower) *Brachyloma daphnoides* (Daphne Heath), various grasses. Some areas were well endowed with *Pimelea* sp. (Rice-flower) seedlings. Other plants such as acacias seemed to fare less well, with *A. genistifolia* (Spreading Wattle) showing little sign of recovery.

Perhaps as the season progresses seedlings will emerge. Some eucalypts which did not seem to have been burned were producing epicormic growth. Plants including *Prostanthera denticulata* (Rough Mint-bush) and *Daviesia ulicifolia* (Gorse Bitter-pea) were less affected by the burn, even where they were in a substantially burned area.

Some form of autumn flowering *Pterostylis* (Greenhood orchid) was in bud within the burned area. We later saw two *Corunastylis* sp (Midge Orchids) growing on the unburned fringe of the burned area. *Astroloma humifusum* (Cranberry Heath) was about the only other flowering plant in evidence.

*Note - I returned to the burned area of Kalimna on 20/3 and found three *Eriochilus cucullatus* (Parson's Bands) also on the unburned fringe of the burned area.

Later in the afternoon (of 13/3) we adjourned to a roadside verge in Weynton Road, where Denis Hurley had seen Greenhood orchids and Midge orchids. I later searched our property (which is in Weynton Road) and discovered two patches of Greenhoods, but sadly no Midge Orchids.



P. revoluta Autumn Greenhood, and *Corunastylis* sp. Midge Orchid, Weynton road.
- photos by Noel Young

Rainbow Lorikeets – A future Castlemaine resident?

Chris Timewell

Prior to the 1970s, the typical distribution of the Rainbow Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus haematodus*) in Victoria was centred on the Grampians and East Gippsland area. At the time, it was considered a rare visitor to the greater Melbourne area, which is probably the same as its current status in the Mount Alexander Shire (the club's current brochure lists it as a "rare" species in the shire). Anyone spending any time in Melbourne's knows that this is no longer the case, with large flocks being a common sight in most suburbs.

According to the *Atlas of Victorian Birds* (Emison *et. al.* 1987), Rainbow Lorikeets first became regularly seen in the greater Melbourne area in the early-mid 1970s. It has been hypothesized that their subsequent spread and permanent establishment across Melbourne is linked to the trend that took off in this decade for planting Australian native trees and shrubs in backyards, parks and gardens. At least initially, a high proportion of these 'natives' were profusely-flowering interstate species such as the Western Australian Red-flowering Gum. By the 1980s, these widespread and abundant plantings had begun reaching an age where they were producing masses of flowers at a range of times throughout the year, which was sufficient to maintain regular resident populations of the nectar-feeding Rainbow Lorikeets in the Melbourne area (and probably also helped other nectarivorous birds such as the Musk Lorikeet).

The spring 2009 Birdline report for northern Victoria (in the December edition of *Vic Babbler*, a publication of the Victorian branch of Birds Australia) stated that *Rainbow Lorikeets continue their slow spread north (or is it east) with sightings in*

Boort, Bendigo and Castlemaine. Sightings in Castlemaine are not unprecedented, and therefore the birds recently seen in Castlemaine and Bendigo may have been of individuals just moving through the local landscape, possibly in response to the drought conditions. However, it does raise the interesting prospect that the capacity of flowering trees in the greater Melbourne area to support Rainbow Lorikeets may be reaching saturation point, resulting in groups of birds spreading into the surrounding country in search of new foraging areas.

Personally, I am yet to see a Rainbow Lorikeet in the Mt Alexander Shire. Other local bird-watchers, who have been here longer than me, may have some thoughts on whether they think this species is becoming more common locally. If Rainbow Lorikeets become more regular visitors to this area, or even residents, it will almost certainly increase the level of competition with local birds for limited resources such as nectar and hollows. It will be one to watch in the coming years.

[Note – there are recent 'Birdline' reports of Rainbow Lorikeets at Carisbrook (a single bird on March 19th) and Flora Hill, Bendigo (a pair on March 16th) – ed]

The National Arboretum – Canberra

George Broadway

In 2003, a huge area of pine plantation between Lake Burley-Griffin and Mount Stromlo was burnt in the bushfires which devastated the adjoining suburbs. Following the fires, the ACT Government held a nation wide competition for the design of an arboretum and gardens to replace part of the pine forest, 250 hectares in all. The winning design proposed over 100 forests (actually 109), each comprising maybe about 1000 trees of rare, threatened or symbolic trees from around the world.

Up to November 2009, about 22,600 trees have been planted in 41 different lots. These are in addition to two forests which survived the fires, one of Himalayan Cedars and one of Cork Oaks. There were also a few individual specimens of Aleppo Pine on the summit of Dairyfarmers' Hill. In 2010 it is planned to plant another 26 forest lots. These will include English Oak, Pecan, Totara, Oriental Hornbeam, and *Eucalyptus tricarpa*, which is our local Ironbark. Several eucalypts are already planted, including Red Stringybark, Red Box, Yellow Box and Manna Gum. Other Indigenous species include Western Queensland White Gum, Wollemi Pine, Camden White Gum and Buchan Blue Acacia.

The plan for the area also includes outdoor sculptures, a café/restaurant, visitor centre, hotel, Bonsai display and childrens' playground. There is a tiered central valley for ceremonial gardens in which a number of foreign dignitaries have already planted trees of their respective homelands. Other features are a large dam, a loop road around the site and walking tracks to the peak of Dairyfarmers' Hill, the central high point.

As Phee and I were driving to the airport recently on our way to Canberra, we switched on the ABC radio in the car just in time to hear Macca say that he was broadcasting that morning from the top of Dairyfarmers' Hill in the new National Arboretum, and that the Arboretum would be open to traffic on that day only and



that the public were welcome to attend. Normally it is closed except for Sundays when the public is allowed to enter but only on foot. He then interviewed members of staff who explained what it was all about. As we were heading to Canberra to view the Post Impressionist painters from Paris the following day, we decided that instead of picking up our hire car and heading to the Botanical Gardens as intended, we would go instead

straight to the arboretum. We headed in the direction in which we supposed the arboretum lay which fortunately took us close to where Phee's sister lives, so called in for a surprise visit, a cup of coffee and precise directions.

There was no mistaking the entrance to the Arboretum as the line of cars was already quite long. However it did not take long to find a park and make our way to the area which been set up for the day with display tents where various environmental groups offered advice on matters horticultural, selling young trees in tubes, etc. There were also a number of food stalls. As buses were running frequently on tours of the area we took the tour to the top of the hill from which could



be had a magnificent view of Canberra and Lake B-G. (Macca had departed by this time). The bus was then rejoined for the tour of the remainder of the site. On each bus a commentary was given by a member of the Friends group.

After a lunch from one of the stalls we continued on to the Botanical Gardens for our usual visit. There we were impressed by a special display of Bonsai, all of which were of indigenous plants. We were invited to cast a vote for our favourite, a task which I found very difficult as there were so many spectacular efforts. One which appealed however was a group of *Allocasuarinas*, which with their attractive bark made a very pleasing sight.

After that was I keen to visit the Emu bush section of the gardens as I have planted a number of them in our new garden. What a disappointment however. Maybe the Canberra climate is not so suitable for them, but I felt that our display at home was much better than what was on offer there.

Notes by Richard Piesse

A walk on 24th March in the valley of Skeleton Creek, and along the coastal reserve to the valley of Laverton Creek revealed some interesting birds, including Pied Oystercatcher, White faced Heron, Australian Pelican, Black Swan, Straw necked Ibis, Eastern Swamphehen, Dusky Moorhen, Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Silver Gull, Blue Wren, Red Wattlebird, Magpie, and Magpie-lark.

Late December '09, on Mount Alexander, noted the following plants:

Isotoma axillaris – Rock Isotome, *Wahlenbergia stricta* ssp. - Tall Bluebell, *Convolvulus augustissimus* – Pink Bindweed

Ararat walk 13th March: *Astroloma humifusum* – Cranberry Heath; *Pelargonium rodneyanum* – Magenta Stork's-bill; *Eriochilus cucullatus* – Parson's Bands

New Walking circuit in Ararat

The Great Dividing Trail Association, Ararat Landcare, and the Rural City of Ararat have developed a 15 km walk to the north and north-west of the City centre.

The two sections of the walk of most interest to CFNC members are the walking track along Cemetery Creek, and three kilometres of the walk which passes through the Ararat Regional Park. This latter section could be described as an "Orchid paradise" in the spring.

The walk commences and finishes at the Ararat Railway Station. There is an alternative return route via the Ararat main street.



Geraldine Harris took this macro-pic of Midge Orchids on her property recently. There is a tiny fly on the left side [inset below] carrying a ball of pollen, which could well be the pollinator for the species!



An art exhibition by *Lorraine Le Plastrier* will be held in the Phee Broadway foyer April 15th to May 12th

"The paintings are from my sketches done at the **Broome Bird Observatory** and I would like to extend an invitation to my co members in the club to come along and have a look at what I have come up with."

"The **Broome Bird Observatory** is on Roebuck Bay which is a wetland of wonder and a significant part of the complex migratory habits of birds. There are only a dozen or so of these places in the world and each one of them are essential for the preservation of bird-life."

Observations

At the March meeting:-

- ◆ Geraldine brought along a snake-skin shed by a Red - bellied Black snake.
- ◆ Natalie found a Golden Orb weaver in the garden
- ◆ Dianne flushed a micro-bat while cleaning blinds on the house
- ◆ Jan Hall reported seeing a Barbary Dove
- ◆ George noted that millipedes were prolific on the golf course greens
- ◆ Geoff Harris has seen Eastern Spinebills in the garden
- ◆ Debbie Worland has seen Diamond Firetail Finches, Bee-eaters, Swamp Harriers, a Black Falcon and an Antechinus.
- ◆ Julie reported Flame Robins south east of Castlemaine in the previous two or three weeks
- ◆ Tony Morton found Eltham Copper butterflies settling on Bursaria in the Kalimna Park above Doveton St
- ◆ Late March -
- ◆ Not many birds around now. Striated Pardalotes calling. - Denis Hurley
- ◆ Poltergeists in Greenhill Avenue?. George heard a Boobook Owl calling in the early hours, which was silenced by a loud harsh repeated cry coming from close by. His attempts to imitate it to the committee resulted in suggestions from a Fruit bat to a Puma. We remain mystified!
- ◆ Rita has noticed the prolific flowering of Grey Box and Yellow Box and early start for some Acacias. She has also had glimpses after dark of (possibly) an Owlet Nightjar.
- ◆ On 16th March I relocated the (ill fated) Red capped Robins' nest near Manchester Reef, and less than 100 m up the track found a female, quite possibly the same one, as she showed little inclination to move off while I was close. On the same day, Ed Oram had seen a Powerful Owl roosting with a kill in the Gardens. I couldn't find it, but instead found a Great Cormorant roosting on the island with three White Ibis for company. On 25th, Ed and I found the Powerful Owl, but could not find any pellets – Noel Young

<p>Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p>

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

April 2010

Fri Apr 9 meeting: JULIA BROWN: Connecting Country

Sat Apr 10 field trip: *Lerderderg River (Blackwood area)

***Please note special departure time: 11 am**

Fri May 14 meeting: NEIL MARRIOTT on Grevilleas

Sat May 15 field trip: Sailors Falls

Fri June 11 meeting: PAT BINGHAM "Fine feathers make fine birds"

Sat June 12 field trip: Welsh Village

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Denis Hurley's; 20 Merrifield St., at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2010

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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